

**Wyoming Game & Fish  
Department's  
Private Lands Public Wildlife  
Access Program**



**2011 Annual Report**

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For more information, call the PLPW Access Program at (307) 473-3428 or visit the Wyoming Game & Fish Departments website at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov>.

## **Introduction**

Wyoming, like the rest of the nation, has seen a decrease in hunting and fishing activities. One of the main contributing factors has been decreased access to private and landlocked public lands for recreation. During the late 1990s, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission directed the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department) to create the Private Lands Public Wildlife (PLPW) Access Initiative which provided hunting and fishing access to the public by enrolling private landowners into easement contracts. The Initiative was such an overwhelming success not only for the Department but also for participating landowners, hunters and anglers that it became a permanent program of the Department in 2001, and became known as the Private Lands Public Wildlife Access Program.

The goal of the PLPW Access Program is to enhance and/or maintain public hunting and fishing access onto private and landlocked public lands throughout the state. This is accomplished by enrolling private landowners into one of three PLPW Access programs: Hunter Management Area (HMA); Walk-in Hunting Area (WIHA); and Walk-in Fishing Area (WIFA) to allow free public hunting and/or fishing on private property. The landowner and Department personnel negotiate the terms of the simple one-page contract including length (one to five years), the species that can be harvested, the area and dates access will be allowed, and any other specific rules or stipulations desired. In return for access, landowners benefit in several ways including:

- A modest monetary payment based on the number of acres or stream length enrolled (Appendix A).
- Increased law enforcement presence.
- Increased wildlife management (population control and damage prevention).
- Management of the sportsmen and sportswomen thus alleviating evening phone calls and other disruptions.

During 2011, hunters enjoyed access to 1,176,497 acres of private and state land through the HMA program and 706,253 acres through the WIHA program. Anglers enjoyed access to 4,944 lake acres and 107 stream miles through the WIFA program. Additionally, any public acres located within or adjacent to enrolled private lands were also accessible. A conservative estimate of the additional public land acres hunters enjoyed as a result of these programs was 1.7 million. The combined private and public land acres were approximately 3.58 million acres in 2011.

The Department also benefits by providing hunting and fishing access onto private land for the public. Increased hunting access enables the Department and the Wyoming Game & Fish Commission to better manage wildlife populations toward species objectives. Concurrently, this helps to reduce agriculture damage, disperses hunters and increases license sales. During a 2011 survey of participating landowners, 88.9% indicated they were satisfied with their involvement in the PLPW Access Program. Hunters and anglers were likewise satisfied with the access provided to them through the Walk-in Hunting Areas (87.1%), Hunter Management Areas (75.8%) and Walk-in Fishing Areas (97.1%).

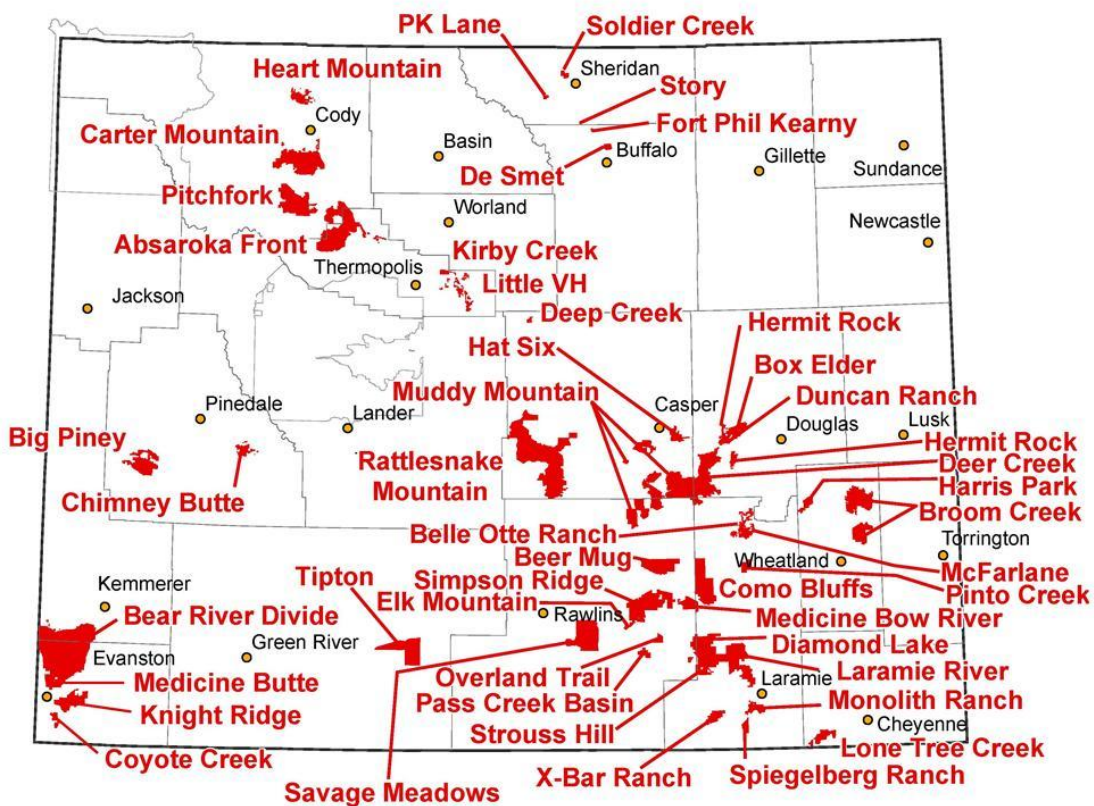
During 2011, the PLPW Access Program received authorization to add a fourth Regional Access Coordinator that will be stationed in the Green River Region. This coordinator will manage the

entire southwest corner of the state from Jackson to Baggs. With the addition of the fourth Regional Access Coordinator, there will be an emphasis on spending more time patrolling and maintaining signs on existing areas and searching out new highly prized areas.

### **Hunter Management Areas**

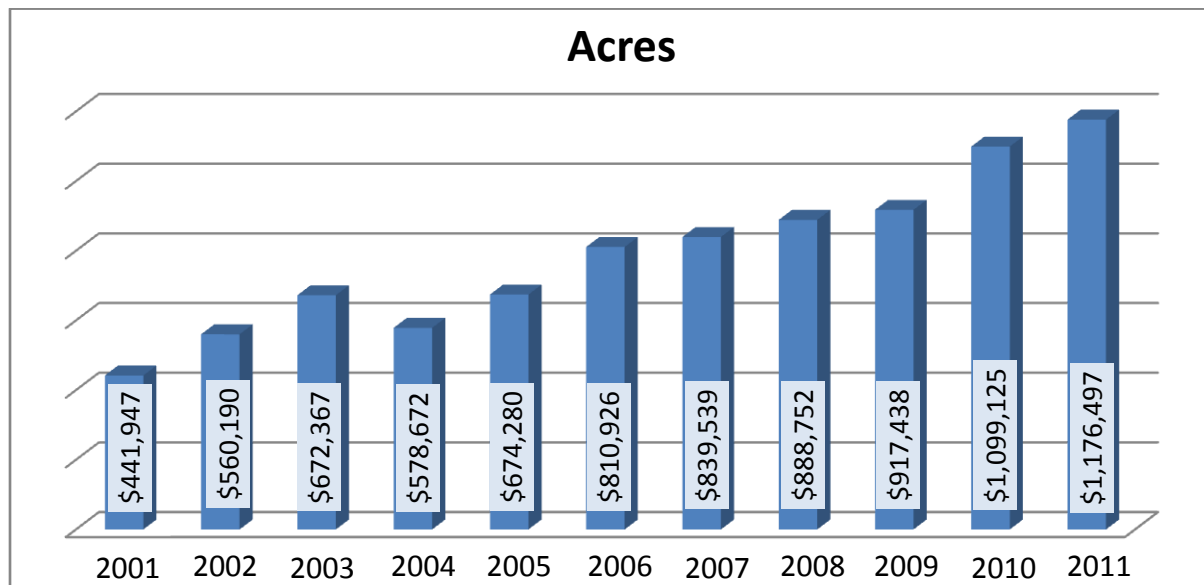
A Hunter Management Area is comprised of one or more ranches. Anyone wishing to hunt a HMA must first obtain a permission slip from the Department. In 2011, there were 53 HMAs statewide (Figure 1) totaling 1,176,497 acres (Figure 2). A HMA can provide unlimited, limited first-come first-served or limited random draw hunter access. The type of HMA depends upon several factors such as desired harvest levels, hunter participation, wildlife population numbers, landowner preference and agricultural damage. Permission slips are issued either at check stations, Department Regional Offices or via the Internet. In 2011, more than 16,200 individual hunters applied for permission over the Internet and an additional 650 permission slips were issued on three HMAs that require hard-copy distribution. Hard-copy permission slips are issued for HMAs located on military reservations and state parks. The Internet application for permission has been especially popular as hunters no longer have to physically go to a regional office or check station to get permission. Nonresident hunters benefit the most as they can receive permission before coming to Wyoming. The number of permission slips issued via the Internet has increased each year since 2005 when it was first implemented.

**Figure 1. Hunter Management Areas in Wyoming for 2011**





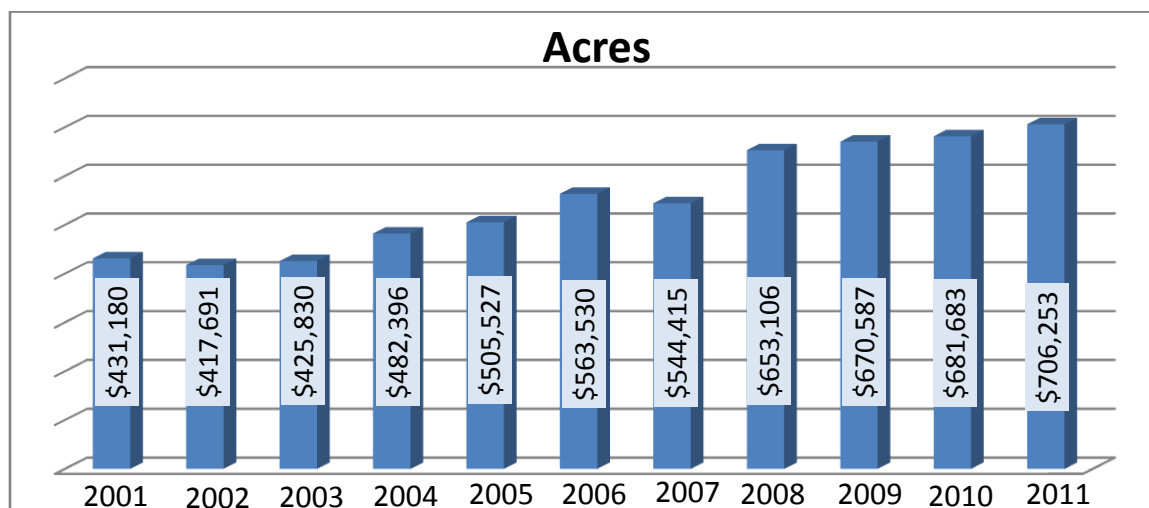
**Figure 2. Hunter Management Area acres from 2001 to 2011**



### **Walk-in Hunting Areas**

Walk-in Hunting Areas are typically smaller parcels of property that unless otherwise stated, are only accessible by foot. A few larger areas are accessible by horse or allow limited vehicular traffic. Hunters wishing to use these areas can locate them using a Department published hard copy atlas or via the Internet with printable maps. No permission slip is required as any hunter with a valid license may use a WIHA. Each area is open during a specific time and only for species agreed upon by the landowner and the Department. WIHAs provide an opportunity for almost every species hunted in Wyoming. There are WIHAs in 21 of Wyoming's 23 counties providing hunting access to 706,253 private and state acres. Access through the WIHA program has increased every year but two (Figure 3).

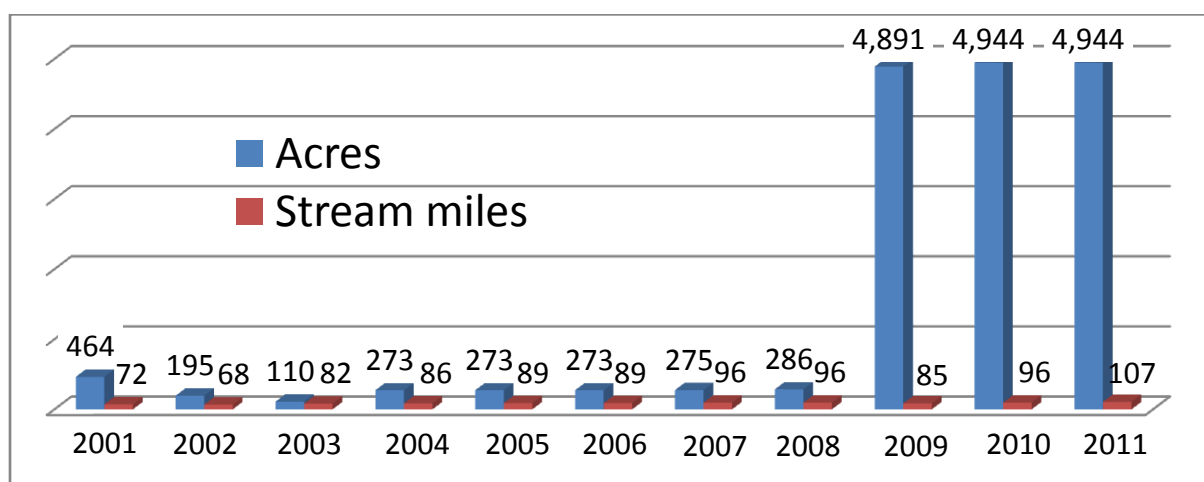
**Figure 3. Walk-in Hunting Area acres from 2001 to 2011**



## Walk-in Fishing Areas

Walk-in Fishing Areas provide increased fishing opportunity in Wyoming. As with the WIHA program, anglers simply locate the area and walk in to fish. WIFAs are usually open from January 1 – December 31 unless otherwise stated. The Department provides fishing information and maps through the Department's website and a hard copy atlas. During 2011, anglers had access to 4,944 lake/pond acres and 107 stream miles (Figure 4). As a result of this program, there was an additional estimated 32 miles of stream access on public land available to anglers. Due to historically fluctuating water levels, WIFAs are evaluated annually to ensure there is still a viable fish population available to anglers.

**Figure 4. Walk-in Fishing Area lake acres and stream miles from 2001 to 2011**



## Survey Results

During 2011, the Department contracted with Disc Information Services, Inc., to conduct intensive surveys of participating landowners, hunters/anglers and Department employees. These surveys were similar to those conducted in 2006 to determine satisfaction with programs, information on constituents and any needed changes to the PLPW Access Program. The surveys provided much needed information in order to keep the PLPW Access Program one of the Department's most successful.

All participating landowners were surveyed to determine their concerns and comments. Without the landowners enrolling their property into either the Walk-in or Hunter Management Area, there would not be a PLPW Access Program. By understating participating landowner feedback, it will help the Department address their concerns and ensure their continued participation in the program. A total of 541 surveys were sent with a 48.1% response rate. From participating landowner respondents, 88.9% (91.8% in 2006) were satisfied with the program. It is very encouraging that nearly 90% of participating landowners were satisfied with all aspects of how the access area on their property was managed. Landowners agreed 71.2% (87.2% in 2006), that the WIA or HMA on their property met their expectations for enrollment, and 67.2% (64.3% in 2006) of landowners felt the hunter/angler density was appropriate for their property. One of the main benefits of the PLPW

Access Program is strengthening relationships between hunters, anglers, landowners and the Department. Landowners felt their relationships with hunters/anglers were strengthened by 38.1% (39.9% in 2006) or remained the same 57.3% (53.4% in 2006) and agreed their relationship with the Department has also strengthened by 57.8% (53.4% in 2006). An increased relationship with all constituents is a major accomplishment as it allows for future cooperation between all groups. Landowners indicated they were satisfied by 78.8% (83.3% in 2006) with the behavior of hunters/anglers, and 96.8% (95.9% in 2006) of landowners felt it was very easy to work with the Department in establishing an access area on their land.

The PLPW Access Program can only function properly with the assistance of other Department employees. This program is truly a team effort incorporating personnel from every Division including field and office staff. Therefore, their input is crucial to continued success. All Department employees were divided into two categories based upon whether or not they had direct contact with sportsmen or landowners. Of those employees that had direct contact with the public, 63.6% (55.9% in 2006) had done work related to the PLPW Access Program primarily involving contact with hunters, anglers and landowners. Nearly half of the respondents 47.7% (39.1% in 2006), reported there was an increase in their involvement in the PLPW Access Program, due to more personal involvement. The PLPW Access Program often assists the Department with other issues such as population management and damage prevention. Of employees, 75.9% agreed that the work they performed for the PLPW Access Program assisted them with their own duties.

Those employees that have no direct contact with the public were surveyed as they provide much of the logistic support that keeps the program running smoothly. Of the respondents, 66.1% had done work related to the PLPW Access Program. Only 31% indicated there had been an increase in the amount of time they spent on access issues. The majority of these personnel were from Services and Fiscal Divisions. Overall, employees agreed that the PLPW Access Program provided a valuable service to their job duties, landowners and sportsmen.

The third survey was sent to 2010 hunting and fishing license holders. Anglers were divided into resident and nonresident with a random sample of 2,500 individuals from each category surveyed. Hunters were divided by species licenses (antelope, deer, elk, small game and upland bird) with a sample size of 10% from each species receiving a survey making sure there were no duplicates to maximize the number of individuals that received a survey. Hunters and anglers were asked about their participation in Walk-in Hunting Areas, Walk-in Fishing Areas, Hunter Management Areas and the Access Yes Program.

For Walk-in Hunting Areas, 22.9% (20% in 2006) of respondents indicated they used the program to hunt approximately 6-10 times. The most popular species pursued on a WIHA was antelope (28.7%), deer (27.9%), elk (14.2%) and pheasants (12.7%). Overall, 80.5% (75.4% in 2006) of respondents were very satisfied 37.5% (34.2% in 2006) or satisfied 43% (41.2% in 2006) with the opportunities provided to them through the WIHA program. Furthermore, 81.4% (73.7% in 2006) agreed that the availability of the WIHA allowed them to hunt more than they would have without these areas. As with landowners, relationships with hunters and anglers are crucial for continued support. Hunters agreed that their relationship with landowners (64.8%) and the Department (63.4%) have strengthened because of their participation in the WIHA program.

For Walk-in Fishing Areas, 9.9% (9.5% in 2006) of respondents indicated they used the program to fish approximately 1-3 times. Most anglers used areas in Fremont and Natrona counties. Overall, 87.3% (78.5% in 2006) of respondents were either very satisfied 40.4% (30.8% in 2006) or satisfied 46.9% (47.7% in 2006) with the opportunities available to them through the WIFA program. Of anglers, 79% (63.6% in 2006) agreed that the availability of fishing areas allowed them to fish more than they would have without these areas. Relationships with landowners (61.9%) and the Department (66.2%) strengthened with anglers as well. Of respondents, 91.7% (89.9% in 2006) plan on using a WIFA again.

The Hunter Management Areas saw similar results to the Walk-in Areas. Of respondents, 11% (10% in 2006) used a HMA to hunt primarily for antelope (34.6%), elk (28%) and deer (23.4%). The most popular HMA was Muddy Mountain (11.2%) and Bear River Divide (7%). Overall, 81.4% (85% in 2006) of respondents were either very satisfied 41.9% (30% in 2006) or satisfied 39.5% (55% in 2006) with the opportunities provided to them with 75.9% (74.8% in 2006) agreeing that the availability of HMAs allowed them to hunt more than without them. Hunters agreed that the HMA program had strengthened their relationship with landowners (69.5%) and the Department (68.1%) with 86% (79.8% in 2006) indicating they will hunt on HMAs next year.

The Access Yes (AY) program is the funding mechanism for the PLPW Access Program. Funds from AY can only be used for landowner easement payments by state statute. The survey included questions dedicated to understanding how hunters and anglers felt about the AY program. Of respondents, only 59.1% (60.1% in 2006) had even heard of AY and only 28.1% (26.4% in 2006) said they donated to it. Most respondents (59%) didn't know that AY funds can only be used for easements. Most hunters did not donate to AY because they were not aware of how the program worked; felt they already spent too much or the Department should provide access from existing fees. When asked what type of financial assistance they would support, 36.1% (52% in 2006) suggested a management stamp (average \$9.67) however they also stated they did not like the number of stamps/permits they are already required to purchase/carry. Hunters also listed donation 24.2% (52.3% in 2006), fee increase (average \$5.57) on conservation stamps (17.1%), surcharge (average \$4.87) on licenses (13.2%) and other (9.3%) that included big game license raffles or Legislative appropriations.

### **Wildlife Habitat Enhancement**

Wildlife habitat is crucial for sustainable wildlife populations. The PLPW Access Program offers Wildlife Habitat Enhancement (WHE) grants that provide monetary assistance to landowners enrolled in any of its access programs. Participating landowners can utilize up to \$1,500 to develop or enhance wildlife habitat on their property. These funds are usually combined with other funding sources including non-governmental organizations and federal programs through the Farm Bill to conduct larger habitat projects. During 2011, three habitat projects including disking and inter-seeding with grass/legumes and two projects on wildlife friendly fencing were conducted totaling \$4,497. WHE projects can include, but are not limited to, pond construction, off-site water sources, seeding, food plots, shelterbelt planting, fencing, deferred grazing and stream bank stabilization.



### **Hunter/Landowner Assistance Program**

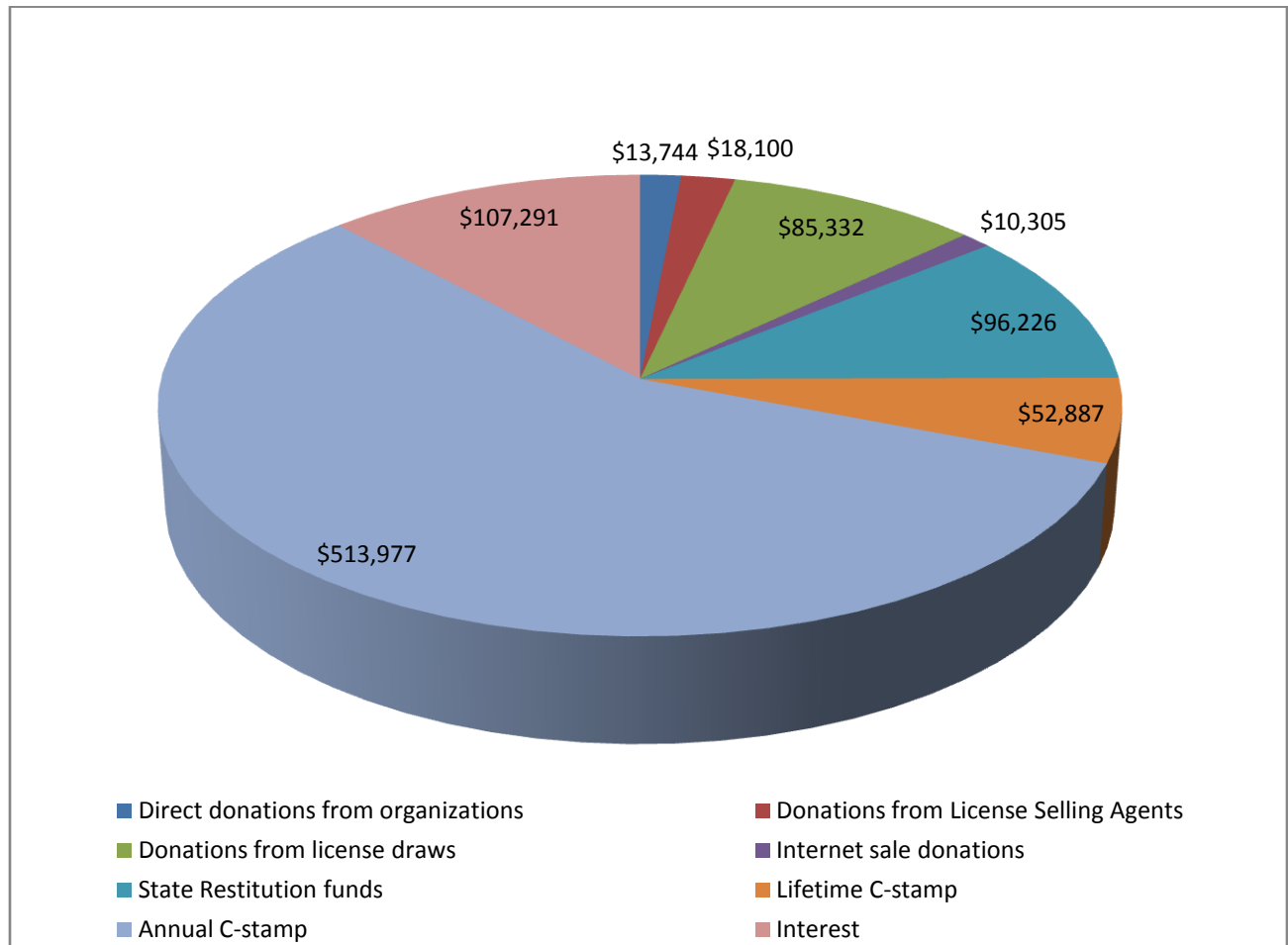
The Hunter/Landowner Assistance Program (HLAP) was developed to connect hunters with landowners who desire additional harvest on their property, but are not interested in enrolling in either the HMA or WIHA program. Each fall, field personnel come in contact with landowners who desire additional big game harvest and request assistance from hunters. A landowner's contact information, the corresponding hunt area and designated species are made available on the Department's website. Hunters seeking additional big game hunting access can obtain the information from the Department's website and contact the landowner(s) directly. Once the landowner has achieved their desired harvest, their name is removed from the website. This program works well for those landowners who want direct control over the number of hunters as well as when and where they hunt. During 2011, 32 returning landowners and 15 new landowners utilized this program. Many of the previous participating landowners chose not to utilize the HLAP a second year because they achieved their desired big game harvest or have returning hunters from previous years.

### **Access Yes Program**

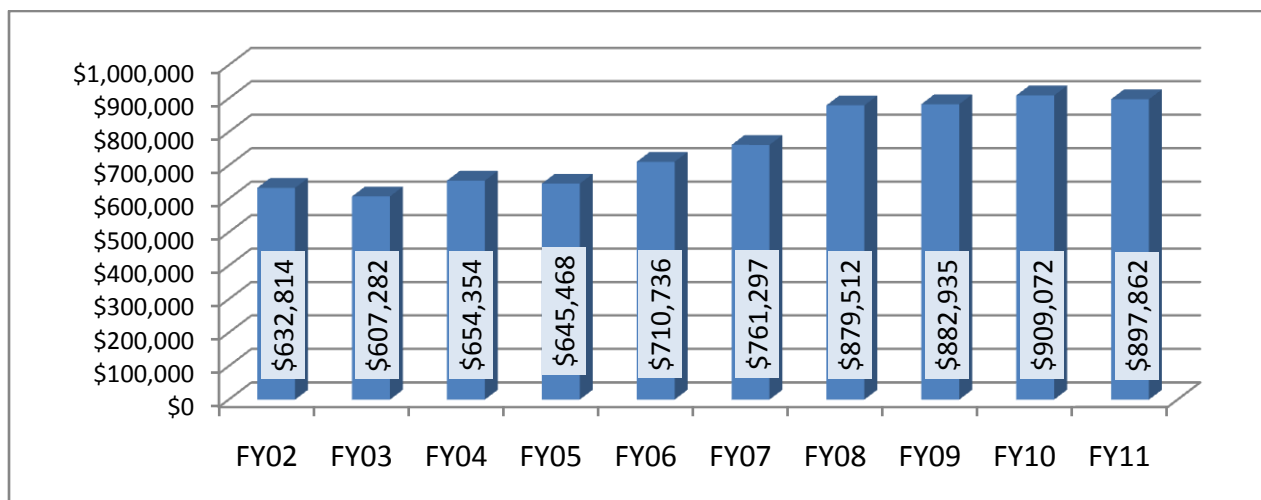
In 2011, just under \$835,000 was paid for landowner easements through the Walk-in and Hunter Management Area programs. During Fiscal Year 2011 (June 2010 – July 2011), a total of \$879,862 was received which will be used for landowner easement payments during Fiscal Year 2012. This is a decrease of \$29,210 from FY10 (\$909,072).

Access Yes funds are derived from several sources including donations from individuals or organizations, restitution funds, portion of both the annual and lifetime conservation stamp sales and interest (Figure 5). Individuals can make donations to Access Yes when they purchase licenses or stamps at any License Selling Agent (LSA) or apply for licenses through the limited quota draw applications. Sportsmen can also donate to Access Yes when they purchase licenses and stamps on the Department's website. Direct donations are received from organizations specifically for easements. During 2011, donating organizations included: National Wild Turkey Federation, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Pheasants Forever, Bow Hunters of Wyoming, Cheyenne Field Archers, Safari Club International and Ducks Unlimited. Half of the proceeds from lifetime conservation stamps and \$2.50 from each annual conservation stamp go into the Access Yes fund. Additionally, state restitution fines derived from Wyoming courts on wildlife violations can be placed into the Access Yes fund. Total Access Yes funds increased from FY03 to FY10 but decreased in FY11 (Figure 6). The struggling national economy has impacted the number of hunters and anglers getting licenses and donating to Access Yes. Funds collected during FY12 will determine if the decrease will continue or if they will recover to FY10 levels.

**Figure 5. Access Yes funds received during Fiscal Year 2011**



**Figure 6. Access Yes funds by Fiscal Year since 2002**



## **Future Concerns**

Though the PLPW Access Program has been quite successful, there are two areas of concern: personnel and funding. The PLPW Access Program consists of a Statewide Access Coordinator and four Regional Access Coordinators. During critical periods of the year, PLPW personnel often find it hard to assist with all access related issues that arise. The PLPW Access Program relies heavily on Regional Game Wardens and Wildlife Biologists assisting with these duties and it is only through their assistance that the program is able to provide the access it does.

Funding is another issue. For the last four years, easement payments have come close to total Access Yes funds, thus limiting the number of additional acres that can be enrolled. Additionally, donations from hunters and anglers decreased during FY11 as economic concerns nationwide have negatively influenced both license sales and donations. A long term stable funding source is needed to maximize landowner enrollment.

## **Benefits of the Private Lands Public Wildlife Access Program**

The PLPW Access Program has provided many benefits to landowners, hunters, anglers and the Department. Hunters and anglers benefit by having access to nearly 3.58 million acres of private, state and federal lands in all of Wyoming's 23 counties. During a 2011 survey, 78.8% of responding hunters/anglers said they hunted and fished more because of the availability of PLPW Access areas. Respondents also agreed (83.1%) that they were satisfied with the access opportunities provided to them. Based on this data, it is clear the PLPW Access programs are helping to address the Department's concern regarding hunter/angler recruitment and retention.

Landowners benefited from being enrolled into the PLPW Access Program by receiving a monetary payment and increased law enforcement presence, but most importantly, landowners appreciate the management of the hunters and anglers by the Department. Many large landowners receive year-round requests for access from resident and nonresident hunters and anglers. The Department has taken that burden from the landowner by managing access for them. During the 2011 survey, 89% of the participating landowners indicated they were satisfied with their enrollment in one of the PLPW Access programs. They indicated it was easy to work with the Department and felt that their relationship had strengthened with both the Department and sportsmen. During 2011, the PLPW Access Program had 682 individual landowner contracts in either a Walk-in or Hunter Management Area. Many of these landowners (61.2%) were comfortable with the program and opted to sign long-term five year agreements.

During 2011, over 16,200 hunters applied for or received hunting access through the HMA program. Determining the number of hunters and anglers using a Walk-in Area program is more difficult since they are not required to get a permission slip or check in before using an access area. Therefore, there is no way to know the exact number of sportsmen that use a PLPW Access area. However, using harvest surveys from 2010, 24% of all pronghorn antelope, 17.1% of deer and 13.3% of elk hunters hunted on a PLPW Access Program area.

The Department benefits from the PLPW Access program by better managing wildlife populations thereby decreasing agriculture damage. Increased access equates to more people hunting and

fishing, increased license sales and revenue important to maintaining the quality of the Department's programs. Several hunt areas that historically had unissued licenses, are now selling out due in large part to increased access. The PLPW Access program has strengthened the relationships between the Department, sportsmen and landowners as a result of their participation in the program.

The PLPW Access Program continues to provide extensive access for both hunting and fishing while addressing landowner and Department concerns. The program is, however, stretched to its limits due to a limited number of personnel and funding. These two issues will have to be addressed for the program to expand.

## Appendix A. Landowner payment table for PLPW Access Program

### Walk-In Hunting and Hunter Management Area Access

Acres	1 Yr Base Rate	2 Yr (5%)		3 Yr (10%)		4 Yr (15%)		5 Yr (20%)	
		Bonus	Total	Bonus	Total	Bonus	Total	Bonus	Total
<b>80-250</b>	\$368	\$18	\$386	\$35	\$403	\$52	\$420	\$74	\$442
<b>251-500</b>	\$473	\$23	\$496	\$47	\$520	\$71	\$544	\$95	\$568
<b>501-650</b>	\$630	\$32	\$662	\$63	\$693	\$95	\$725	\$126	\$756
<b>651-999</b>	\$840	\$42	\$882	\$84	\$924	\$126	\$966	\$168	\$1008
<b>1000-2499</b>	\$1260	\$63	\$1323	\$126	\$1386	\$189	\$1449	\$252	\$1512
<b>2500-4999</b>	\$1470	\$74	\$1544	\$147	\$1617	\$221	\$1691	\$294	\$1764
<b>5000-9999</b>	\$1680	\$84	\$1764	\$168	\$1848	\$252	\$1932	\$336	\$2016
<b>10,000+</b>	\$1890	\$95	\$1985	\$189	\$2079	\$284	\$2174	\$378	\$2268

### Waterfowl Walk-In Hunting Access Along Rivers and Streams

Stream- Length (miles)	1 Yr Base Rate	2 Yr (5%)		3 Yr (10%)		4 Yr (15%)		5 Yr (20%)	
		Bonus	Total	Bonus	Total	Bonus	Total	Bonus	Total
<b>&lt;.25</b>	\$630	\$32	\$662	\$63	\$693	\$95	\$725	\$126	\$756
<b>.26 - .50</b>	\$788	\$39	\$827	\$79	\$867	\$118	\$906	\$158	\$946
<b>.51 – 1.0</b>	\$945	\$47	\$992	\$95	\$1040	\$142	\$1087	\$189	\$1134
<b>1.1 - 2.0</b>	\$1103	\$55	\$1158	\$110	\$1213	\$165	\$1268	\$221	\$1324
<b>2.1+</b>	\$1260	\$63	\$1323	\$126	\$1386	\$189	\$1449	\$252	\$1512

### Walk-In Fishing Access

Pond Acreage	Stream Length (miles)	1 Yr Base Rate	2 Yr (5%)		3 Yr (10%)		4 Yr (15%)		5 Yr (20%)	
			Bonus	Total	Bonus	Total	Bonus	Total	Bonus	Total
<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>--</b>	\$315	\$16	\$331	\$32	\$347	\$47	\$362	\$63	\$378
<b>1-5</b>	<b>--</b>	\$473	\$24	\$497	\$47	\$520	\$71	\$544	\$95	\$568
<b>6-25</b>	<b>&lt;.25</b>	\$630	\$32	\$662	\$63	\$693	\$95	\$725	\$126	\$756
<b>26-50</b>	<b>.26 - .50</b>	\$788	\$39	\$827	\$79	\$867	\$118	\$906	\$158	\$946
<b>51-75</b>	<b>.51 – 1.0</b>	\$945	\$47	\$992	\$95	\$1040	\$142	\$1087	\$189	\$1134
<b>76-99</b>	<b>1.1 – 2.0</b>	\$1103	\$55	\$1158	\$110	\$1213	\$165	\$1268	\$221	\$1324
<b>100+</b>	<b>2.1+</b>	\$1260	\$63	\$1323	\$126	\$1386	\$189	\$1449	\$252	\$1512